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ONE-CREDIT HUMANITIES WORKSHOPS FOR VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

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In designing humanities courses for vocational students, course developers should first consider why vocational students cannot be adequately served by the existing curriculum. Vocational students do not need the humanities for a different reason than liberal arts transfer students need the humanities; the perceptual, analytical, and critical skills that humanities disciplines instill are equally useful whether the student enters the job market immediately or after completing a four-year degree. Nor, in my experience, does the academic preparation of vocational students differ from that of liberal arts transfer students. Too many teachers of traditional academic disciplines think of vocational students as being on a somehow lower track because of intellectual inadequacies; in fact, the realities of today's economy have led the smartest, most aware of our students to secure their job status as their first priority, a decision we can in no way condescend to. Finally, in discussions of humanities and vocational students, one often hears defensive fear of the philistines. Our liberal-arts transfer students, we think, can be served by our introduction to literature classes because these students have the right values, and they know that literature is important, but those vocational students have no goals more noble than buying newer, bigger cars. This assumption gives many discussions of humanities for vocational students the unpleasant odor of missionaries out to civilize the natives. In fact, I can detect no such differential in values among my students. Students in office administration and students in English are equally likely to have seen a recent play or film, or to have heard a recent

recording, or to care about exhibits at the art museum, or to like Bach. In short, I think any program which seeks to serve vocational students as if the students were inherently different from liberal-arts transfer students is off on the wrong heading.

Why then should vocational students get their own humanities classes? Not because the students are different, but because the programs in which they are enrolled are different. Vocational programs require more credit hours each quarter from their students and sometimes require more classroom hours per credit. Vocational programs are more likely to specify exactly what courses should be taken, in exactly what order, at exactly what times. Vocational programs leave students many fewer electives. Students in vocational programs are usually trying to finish the program more quickly, and are more often working at a job or an internship as well. That is to say, vocational programs impose extremely tight constraints on time and on credit hours. Because of these constraints, the ordinary five-credit introduction course in the humanities is unavailable to students.

In addition to these two major constraints, there is a minor contextual difference. Liberal arts transfer students are taking a schedule of courses none of which has immediate relevance to their daily lives and so have had to accept or devise a rationale for their investment of time, a rationale which promises long-term benefits. Vocational students are taking a schedule of courses all of which have immediate relevance to their daily affairs, and a humanities course seems, in context, like a less valuable investment of time.

A humanities program which serves vocational students must, then, offer courses which fit the tight time and credit constraints of vocational programs, and which are topically oriented to appeal to vocational students' immediate, vocationally-related interest.

At Edmonds Community College we have met this need by offering one-day, one-credit workshops designed around topics such as "Dignity and Work," "Technology and Change," "Designing Yourself," and "Economy and Society." The courses are offered under an umbrella course number for "Exploring the Humanities." The content and the methods of the workshops can be derived, almost algebraically, from the initial constraints.

Because the workshops seek to introduce students to the humanities, not to English or art or history, they should be interdisciplinary and team-taught. Because they seek to join humanities disciplines to vocational concerns, instructors should come from vocational as well as humanities disciplines. In order to justify the investment of five or six instructors' time, there must be a large number of students, in our case a hundred or so.

Because a single day is a short time in which to offer a class, the workshop should use presentational strategies able to compress information tightly. Because a whole day is a long time to sit still, the presentation strategies should be varied, using different media, different people, perhaps different spaces, and students should be made as active as possible, having a chance to use their hands and voices, a chance to move their bodies.

The constraints have shaped courses different in almost every way from the courses that we usually teach. In their planning and execution, problems will be encountered that we don't deal with in our composition or western civilization courses. At Edmonds we were fortunate to have the support of a National Endowment for the Humanities pilot grant to allow us the time and money to learn how to make such courses succeed. Having done so, we have developed the following checklist of procedures for the development and delivery of such courses, which should allow other institutions to duplicate our success without having to duplicate our initial experiments.

I hope that other institutions will do so, not only so that they may better serve their vocational students, but also so that they may encounter the same spin-off benefits. Having been led by given constraints to design these workshops, we have learned from them teaching strategies which we now adopt in courses where the constraints do not apply. Interdisciplinary team teaching was considered a means to one end; several unforeseen benefits also accrued. The faculty found they had more fun teaching together than they have teaching alone. They found that planning as a group let them create material they were incapable of creating singly. They found that working outside narrow disciplines let them use more sides of themselves than they used within their disciplines.

The presentational strategies which faculty adopted to meet the needs of students in the all-day class also served the needs of their students in fifty-minute classes. We originally gave students active, physical involvement just to be humane to students who were committed for eight hours; we found that they learned better that way, and since that discovery we have taken every opportunity to engage our other students more actively. Finally, the contact between disciplines required to create the courses sparked a feeling of community, which has led to the development of other interdisciplinary courses, to guest lectures in each other's classes, to working jointly on problems which we used to address singly. Working together to create courses for vocational students demanded an investment which has been repaid many times over in unexpected ways.

HUMANITIES MODULES FOR VOCATIONAL STUDENTS: A Checklist

1. Initial impetus
   ___ Must come from humanities and vocational instructors.

2. First planning group meeting
   ___ Interdisciplinary group.
   ___ Informal atmosphere. Share food and drink.
   ___ Not a briefing, but joint consideration, starting from zero.

3. Bringing in other people early
   ___ Who else would be interested?
   ___ Whose support will be needed?

4. Selecting a topic
   ___ High topical interest.
   ___ Immediately apparent applicability to vocational studies.
   ___ Interest to faculty.

5. Seeing how humanities disciplines address the topic
   ___ How topic is reflected in art, music, literature, film.
   ___ How humanities skills help us see the topic in different ways.
   ___ How the humanities are involved in and influence the topic.
   ___ How the day may be broken down.

6. Developing presentational strategies
   ___ Bring in faculty development person for perspective and expertise.
   ___ Other ways than lecture to present information: films, slides, readings, dramatic presentations, video, musical selections, costumes, sets, displays; importance of varying pace and style; importance of effective surprise; importance of high production values.
   ___ Ways of involving students actively (hands and bodies as well as minds): simulations, small-group discussions, problem-solving projects, values auctions, singing, designing environment, building, drawing.

7. Securing administrative support
   ___ Importance of involving administrators early.
   ___ Not just asking approval, but bringing them into planning group, soliciting their ideas.
   ___ Humanities and vocational.
   ___ Approval of course: credit; transferability; department; level; grading; catalog listing; title; instructors' responsibilities.
   ___ Registration: advantages of on-site registration.
   ___ Accountability of students: attendance, performance.
   ___ Funding: how to pay teachers, out of which budget(s), on what scales, as part of load or as moonlighting, all the same or at varying rates; planning money, planning time; budget for materials and supplies; long-term commitment.

7. (continued)
___ Use administrators' talents in the module.
___ Use (perhaps establish) advisory committee.

8. Bringing in presenters
___ What departments should be represented?
___ Importance of vocational instructors: need for their students, need them to promote modules to colleagues, need them to add strength and credibility to presentations.
___ Think not just about individuals' disciplines, but also about other areas of expertise and interest.
___ Outside presenters from the community: recognized expertise, effective speakers, names.
___ Have each plan own presentation, but plan together as well, sharing ideas on the whole, probably at weekly meetings: especially consider unity, consistencey, order, variety, and pacing.

9. Securing a date
___ Check for conflicts.
___ Check with vocational instructors.
___ Consider under-used days: Fridays, advising days, retreat days.

10. Securing students
___ Probably need large number to support team-taught class.
___ Ask vocational instructors to release their classes.
___ Ask vocational instructors involved in the module to bring their students.
___ Ask vocational advisors to steer students.

11. Securing support services
___ Clear room with administration and with everyone else who uses it.
___ Find out what media equipment each presenter needs; importance of specificity: front or back projector? hand or automatic controls? need someone else to change slides? what time needed? importance of double- and triple-checking, of making one person responsible.
___ Other needs: podium, easel, table, carts, extra chairs, lights, etc.
___ Preview films, tapes, slide shows, video; consult media librarian about sources; possible free sources.
___ Remember lunch; need to advise cafeteria? possible to incorporate lunch into module, eat during activity?
___ Breaks: things for students to look at or do while they drink coffee.

12. Preparing a printed packet
___ Have each presenter make up bibliography (or discography, or list of places to go, etc.).
___ Schedule of day's activities.
___ Instructions and materials for projects, simulations.

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12. (continued)
___ Scripts for readings, words for songs, etc.
___ Glossary of key terms or outline of main ideas.
___ Cover? Visual identity.
___ Arrange with campus printing center far in advance.
___ Assign one person to monitor the flow of paper.

13. Preparing evaluations
___ Can use to measure learning or change in attitudes.
___ Possible inventories before and after.
___ Solicit ideas for future modules.
___ Ask about different presentational strategies.
___ Use of good evaluations as selling tool for future modules.
___ Consult expert in educational evaluation.

14. Promotion
___ Not just to students; importance of high profile.
___ Posters (consistent visual identity).
___ Library display on same subject.
___ Announce in classes.
___ Invite people: vocational instructors, humanities instructors, administrators, grant-givers, advisory boards, board of trustees.

15. Rehearsal
___ Check transitions, introductions.
___ Who will instruct students to do what?
___ Who will be responsible for what?

16. Day of presentation
___ Arrive early.
___ Double-check everything; test all equipment.
___ Get all instructors together and review order and possible problems.
___ Introduce yourselves to guests.
___ Everyone there all day; not isolated segments; all doing it together.

17. Immediately after
___ Go out together socially, with guests; read evaluations; capitalize on high energy by considering ideas for future; set date to plan next module.
___ Assign everyone to write up thoughts and feelings; what worked and what didn't?

18. Long-range-planning
___ Coordinating modules.
___ Possible need for core course.
___ Establishing modules on a permanent footing, perhaps as requirement.
___ Expanding reach: try to touch as many people on campus as you can.